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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BUCHAREST 001372

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#) [RO](#)

SUBJECT: ROMANIA CONFRONTS ITS PAST 15 YEARS AFTER MINERS' RAMPAGE; EX-PRESIDENT ILIESCU FACES INDICTMENT

REF: A. A) 04 BUCHAREST 3478

[1](#)B. B) BUCHAREST 1348

Classified By: POLITICAL SECTION CHIEF ROBERT GILCHRIST FOR REASONS 1.4
B AND D

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Events of recent days have focused renewed attention on violence caused by rioting miners in the 1990's that slowed Romanian democratic development and Romanian progress toward market reform. As Romanians commemorated the 15th anniversary of the riots, a court ordered the miners' former leader released from jail. Meanwhile, the press revealed that ex-President Ion Iliescu is under criminal investigation for inciting the riots as well as for his alleged role in violence during Romania's 1989 revolution. Few Romanians believe the former executive will ever serve time. However, many hope there will now be a true accounting of the country's early post-communist history, with culpability for the violence and extra-constitutional measures clearly attributed to those responsible. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) On June 14, Romanians solemnly commemorated the anniversary of the notorious 1990 miner's riots, which brought terror and bloodshed to the capital in the months after Romania's anti-communist revolution. Victims of the riots -- as well as family members of those who were killed -- assembled peacefully in Bucharest's central University Square holding signs calling for justice and prosecution of those responsible. For years, they have assembled on this anniversary and have pressed unsuccessfully for the truth to be officially revealed. Recent events, however, indicate there may finally be progress.

ILIESCU IN THE SPOTLIGHT

[1](#)3. (C) Following weeks of speculation, former President Ion Iliescu's lawyer announced June 9 that Iliescu is under criminal investigation, with charges pending for his alleged role in the riots. This was confirmed in the press by the Public Prosecutor. Iliescu has long been the central focus of accusations that the riots were sponsored, incited, and organized by top officials. The charges reportedly pending against him, but still subject to final approval, include genocide, undermining state authority, undermining the national economy, inhuman treatment, war propaganda, abusive investigation and illegal arrest. Separately, Embassy contacts have said that Iliescu is also under investigation for his alleged role in violence surrounding the December 1989 revolution.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Iliescu initially downplayed the criminal investigation and pending charges related to the riots, asserting that he had merely been named as a "witness" to the events. Shortly thereafter, however, he dismissed his lawyer for revealing the initial news to the press and hired criminal defense lawyer and Social Democratic Party (PSD) Senator Antonie Iorgovan to lead his legal team. Iorgovan -- who has offered to take on the case pro-bono -- is known as one of the top criminal defense attorneys in the country. According to Embassy contacts and press reports, charges related to the riots are also pending against other prominent political figures, including former Prime Minister Petre Roman, former Deputy Prime Minister Gelu Voican Voiculescu, and current Transportation Minister Gheorghe Dobre. The latter, who was a mid-level transportation official at the time, allegedly facilitated the movement of the miners' trains into Bucharest.

[1](#)5. (C) Lawyer Iorgovan has publicly declared that "there is a clear risk" Iliescu could spend the rest of his life in prison. However, many Romanians remain skeptical that Iliescu will ever serve time. Given the complexity of the case and the staleness of the evidence, the trial could take years. Iliescu's advanced age and recently-manifested heart condition could also pose impediments. Additionally, the PSD and Iliescu personally continue to exercise continued influence -- if not outright control -- of much of the court system at multiple levels. More fundamentally, legal experts point out that the case will be difficult to prosecute given that Iliescu was acting at the time as head of state and was obligated to ensure security and preserve institutions. The

press and some Embassy contacts have indicated the PSD is already planning to take every step necessary to protect Iliescu. There is some speculation that the current PSD leadership will use this as a tradeoff to prevent Iliescu from forming a new party following his unsuccessful bid for the PSD presidency in April. (Ref B)

RIOT LEADER RELEASED FROM PRISON

16. (SBU) Coincidentally, a local court in Craiova June 14 ordered the release from prison of Miron Cozma, former miners' union chief and the most visible instigator of the riots. Cozma walked free the same day. In December 2004, Iliescu pardoned Cozma in one of the most controversial moves of his presidency (ref a). In response to widespread public outrage at the time, Iliescu quickly "revoked" the pardon and Cozma was then put back in jail after only two days. The Craiova court determined that Iliescu had no legal basis for revoking the pardon.

17. (SBU) As in December, Cozma's release sparked public outrage, with local television stations replaying video footage of the 1990 violence and newspaper headlines expressing alarm that "a killer had been freed." The Association of Miners, Riot Victims (AVM) called Cozma a "terrorist" and asked the General Prosecutor to reverse the decision. Nonetheless, despite these strong emotions, most analysts acknowledged that the Craiova court acted correctly and cast the blame on Iliescu for initially issuing the pardon. Minister of Justice Monica Macovei called the Craiova court decision "predicable," as there are no constitutional grounds for revoking a presidential pardon. Cozma reportedly "thanked" Macovei for his release. She replied publicly that the Ministry had played no part in the decision and the Cozma could only thank Iliescu. Since his release, Cozma has vowed to establish his own political party and fingered Iliescu as the primary culprit for the violence.

BACKGROUND: THE MINERS' BLOODY RAMPAGE

18. (C) Few events in post-communist Romania evoke as much emotion as the deadly violence perpetrated by the miners in the 1990's. Coming largely from the state-owned mines in the coal-rich southwest of the country, the miners faithfully supported Iliescu in exchange for his assurances of their job security and continued high salaries. Iliescu relied on their electoral support and -- at key junctures -- their willingness to use intimidation and violence in support of his objectives. In short, in the words of one Embassy contact, for a period of several years Iliescu used the burly and club wielding miners as his "personal shock troops."

19. (SBU) In 1990, the miners rampaged through Bucharest three times. The worst was the third riot, in June. Hundreds of students, intellectuals, and other anti-communists were encamped in central Bucharest to call for meaningful democratic reform and the ouster of the former communist nomenclatura whom they believed had derailed the revolution. On June 13, Iliescu and his government used police and other measures to try to dissipate the protesters, sparking violence and disorder throughout the city. Iliescu then called for "responsible forces" (i.e., the miners) to "help" authorities restore order. On June 14, thousands of miners -- abetted by government officials at multiple levels -- boarded trains for central Bucharest. The ensuing violence was unprecedented in the capital, resulting in reportedly dozens of dead and hundreds wounded. On June 15, Iliescu thanked the miners for their actions and their attitude of high civic spirit.⁸ The miners returned to Bucharest in September 1991 in response to government plans to cut mining jobs. After a repeat of earlier violence, then Prime Minister Petre Roman was forced to resign. In 1999, the miners twice attempted to return to Bucharest but were impeded by security forces under orders from the then center-right government of former President Emil Constantinescu.

110. (SBU) As president of the largest miners' union, Miron Cozma was the most visible and vocal figure in the movement and -- in the eyes of many -- held responsibility for much of the violence. In 1999, he was sentenced to eighteen years in prison for events related to the 1991 riot. Cozma is currently appealing another conviction for his role in instigating unrest in January 1999. The appellate court's decision is expected as early as next week, leaving open the possibility that Cozma could return prison.

111. (C) Comment: Although few believe there will ever be prosecutions, the pending charges against Iliescu and others offer hope that an accurate history of the miners' riots may finally come to light. Many Romanians see this -- as well as a true accounting of the 1989 revolution -- as a central mandate for President Traian Basescu and his center-right government. Indeed, it is no coincidence that cheering crowds on December 12 spontaneously convened at University Square to celebrate Basescu's presidential victory. They viewed this location as an embodiment of the ideals of the 1989

revolution and the anti-communist protesters beaten there by miners in 1990. And they viewed Basescu as the political figure most capable of bringing closure to events that still haunt post-communist Romania's political psyche.

112. (C) Comment continued: Also in the past week, several key center-right Members of Parliament introduced a bill that would forbid former communist nomenclatura from holding public office for ten years. Embassy contacts have expressed pessimism the measure will pass in its current form. Nonetheless, it demonstrates a more general commitment by the center-right to purge the vestiges of communism from official life. End Comment.

113. (U) Amembassy Bucharest's reporting telegrams are available on the Bucharest SIPRNET Website:
www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/bucharest.
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